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SOIL REPAIR LESSONS IN WILLAMETTE VALLEY.

By LESLIE M. SCOTT.

History of farming, from pioneer days, shows need of conserving and replenishing land fertility—This Valley the starting place of agriculture in Pacific Northwest—Protracted wheat growing and its consequences—Beginnings of agriculture and development under British and American control—Progress in upbreeding of horses, cattle, sheep and hogs since early settlement—Effects of local conditions on individual character of farmers and modern evolution therefrom—Causes of retarded community growth.

Eighty-five years of farming in the Willamette Valley have enforced the old-new lesson-necessity of soil conservation. This area, one of the most productive in the world, with its ages-old store of soil wealth, yielded to the pioneers immense crops during half a century. Then the dwindling return and the retarded progress of the community brought home the ancient truth that the energies which growing plants take from land, however rich, some day must be given back; and it is better to give them back every year than every quarter or half-century.

This problem of continuous soil repair is now the uppermost one in the Willamette Valley. Farmers are learning to master the problem on these oldest agricultural acres of the Northwest. They are also coming to know the needs of local adaptation, for there are many variations of soil, drainage and altitude that must be studied to find out what treatment or what crop is best.

Speaking broadly, the chief needs are three—clover, lime and drainage, and all three together. Then, too, livestock enters into the economy of things—the respective utilities of hogs, dairy cattle, and sheep; also vetch, kale, rape, rye; apples, pears, cherries, etc. All this proves the far departure from the pioneer condition wherein grain was the staple and the stable product of Willamette Valley farms. Twenty years ago, the Willamette Valley was a heavy exporter of wheat and flour; now it is a heavy importer.

The march of the new time is seen also in the election of Oregon's new Governor—a scientific professor of soils and farm animals, and, withal, a practical farmer. Many years he was dean of the activities of the State Agricultural College, and spokesman of the regeneration of the Willamette Valley. Dr. Withycombe, the farmer-Governor, knows the problem fully. His knowledge begins with pioneer history, in which he is well informed, through study and personal contact. His father, Thomas Withycombe, was a pioneer of the later settlement period in Washington County, and the son there grew into the life of Oregon.

I.

It seems a far glance backward to 1810, when white men made the first gardens in "Old Oregon"—now comprising Oregon, Washington, Idaho and part of Montana—at Oak Point, on Columbia River. These first white tillers of the soil were the Winship brothers, of Brighton, Mass. They planted seeds and started a settlement. But the June freshet of the Columbia River soon ended the enterprise.

Next year, the first farm animals came to old Oregon—late in March, 1811—brought from Sandwich Islands on the ship *Tonquin*, by the fur-trading party of John Jacob Astor. These were fifty hogs (Franchere's *Narrative*, p. 98) and they were landed near the later settlement of Astoria, presumably in the vicinity of Point Adams, where a pen was built to confine them. In that same Spring the Astor newcomers planted radishes, turnips and other garden vegetables; also twelve potatoes. The harvest of these twelve potatoes was 190; in the year 1812, five bushels; in the year 1813, fifty bushels. Besides potatoes, only turnips and radishes matured. This American post, Astoria, fell into the hands of the British as a war prize in 1813, and these first American efforts in agriculture ended.

It seems again a far glance backward to the next farm work in Old Oregon—at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, in

1825. This time the agriculturists were British, headed by Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company. In March, 1825, they planted potatoes and two bushels of peas, which they probably brought up river from Astoria. In the fall of that year Dr. McLoughlin received overland—via the canoe and saddle route of the period—one bushel of wheat, one bushel of oats, one bushel of barley, one bushel of Indian corn and one quart of timothy seed. All produced well next season, excepting the corn; this failure was ascribed to cool nights and poor soil. It may be added that this particular location was not well adapted to corn; others in the Pacific Northwest are more favorable.

By 1828 the wheat crop had increased to such an extent that it was no longer necessary to import that grain for food; nor flour, because a primitive gristmill was built that year at Fort Vancouver. Thus we note the beginning of the gristmill business in Old Oregon. The first sawmill had been built there the year before.

Thus began the wheat-raising business, which developed, in the course of more than half a century, to the chief activity of the Willamette Valley, and later, of Eastern Washington. In the Valley, the business left effects which were injurious to the soil and to the life of the community and made necessary its abandonment as the leading industry. In Eastern Washington and part of Eastern Oregon the wheat crop had been pursued some thirty years without these deleterious effects.

II.

The British gradually extended their farming operations over Old Oregon—to Willamette Valley in 1830; to Nisqually (East of Olympia) in 1833, and to Cowlitz farms (near present town of Toledo) and Fort Colville, about the same time. In October, 1835, considerable progress had been made at Fort Vancouver, as evidenced by the following enumeration: there were 450 cattle, 100 horses, 200 sheep, 40 goats, 300 hogs, 5000 bushels of wheat, 1300 bushels of potatoes, 1000 bushels of

barley, 1000 bushels of oats, 2000 bushels of peas and large variety of garden vegetables; also seedling fruits—apples, peaches, grapes, strawberries, etc. A dairy there contained 50 cows. At Fort Colville were a five-acre garden patch, a water gristmill, and a supply of hogs. Operations at Cowlitz farms went on quite extensively also; we have the testimony of Sir George Simpson, Governor-in-Chief of Hudson's Bay Company, that in 1841 there were at that place: 1000 acres under the plow; a large dairy; 8000 bushels of wheat; 4000 bushels of oats and much barley, potatoes, and other products. There were then at the farm at Puget Sound, 6000 sheep, 1200 cattle and many hogs and horses. The British used these supplies not only for their own consumption, but also for trade with the Russians in Alaska.

Until 1846 the British and the Americans held Oregon jointly; that is, they had equal right to occupy the land and use its resources. Up to 1843 law and order were preserved by the British Hudson's Bay Company, through Dr. McLoughlin, chief factor at Fort Vancouver. After that, governmental functions were exercised by a Provisional Government, instituted by American farmer-settlers, until establishment of the Oregon territorial government in 1849, following the treaty of 1846 with Great Britain, under which the United States secured the Old Oregon country up to the present boundary of Canada.

Until 1835 agriculture was wholly in British hands, except that John Ball, an American, raised a crop of wheat near Champoege (west of Aurora, in Willamette Valley) in 1833, on what was called French Prairie. The Hudson's Bay Company had extended its farming operations to French Prairie in 1830, by locating there a number of its retired fur hunters, many of them bearing French names, from the old French settlements of Canada; hence "French Prairie." The earliest independent American settler was Ewing Young, who had crops growing in Chehalem Valley (near Newberg) in the Spring of 1835. In that same year, Captain Nathaniel Wyeth,

an American, who hoped to establish a business in Oregon rivaling that of the Hudson's Bay Company, had hogs, cattle, and goats, from Sandwich Islands, and grain and garden plants, at Wapato (Sauvie's) Island, on Columbia River. Wyeth relinquished his outfit to the British Company, which in 1841 had there a dairy of 100 cows. In the year that Young and Wyeth were laying the foundations of American agriculture—1835—Jason Lee, the American Methodist missionary, began farming near Salem. Dr. Marcus Whitman, the American Board missionary (Presbyterian-Congregational-Dutch Reformed) did the same near Walla Walla in 1837. Whitman and his associates were massacred by Indians in 1847, and after that, little or nothing was done in farming in Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington for twenty or twenty-five years. Progress in Willamette Valley and at Puget Sound, however, went on.

After these pioneer American farmers—Young, Wyeth, Lee, Whitman—came a growing influx of American agriculturists from the Middle West, until their ascendancy over the British resulted in their establishment of the Provisional Government of 1843 and in the boundary treaty of 1846, under which British abandoned claims north of Columbia River as far as the present Canadian line. American farmer-settlers spread to Puget Sound with the Simmons party in 1845; to Umpqua Valley with the Applegates in 1849, and to Rogue River Valley in 1852. The most successful farmer of the Simmons party was George Bush, a colored man of rare intelligence, industry and force of character.

III.

The Willamette Valley was the first part of the Oregon Country to attract settlers, and thence they spread over the Northwest. This was natural and necessary. This valley was a paradise for pioneers. Nature had endowed it with every possible attraction. Moreover, through the rivers, it was accessible from the sea. The first settlers in the Pacific North-

west were agriculturists and they found that the Willamette Valley opened to them better opportunities than elsewhere. California was still Mexican territory (until 1848). Puget Sound was difficult of access and was slowly settled from the Columbia by way of the Cowlitz. East of the Cascade Mountains, Indians were hostile and expelled the settlers; besides, that region was far distant from the sea and from the ships that were essential to agricultural needs and commerce. Finally, discoveries of gold took a white population there, and river steamboats on the Columbia hastened the opening of the country in the 60s. Military posts then protected the white population. After 1882-83 railroads greatly stimulated the growth of the country. Meanwhile, beginning in the early 70s, wheat growing in Wasco, Umatilla and Walla Walla counties was developing an immense industry and making that country one of the world's great granaries. Extension of the railroad to Puget Sound in 1889 led to quick and enormous development of the country about that great estuary and to creation of ports of commerce there.

Western Oregon, the seat of the original settlement, has made slow progress. Likewise the Coast region of Oregon. The latter has lacked roads and railroads, its ports have been neglected and its soils have been turned to little use. Eastern Oregon contains an immense area that has been little utilized, except for sheep and cattle.

IV.

The favorite product of the pioneer farmers, in Willamette Valley, was wheat. This for several reasons: It was a ready article for sea export; was a convenient measure of value and medium of exchange; could be hauled long distances over rough roads. Moreover, wheat was well adapted to the soil and the long dry weather of Summer. It was the one "best crop" for the pioneers. They could not have made both ends meet with any other. Not lack of wisdom was their portion, as has since been laid up to them by some critics,

but stern necessity. Indeed, the early settlers were a race wise in their generation. And their lot was hard enough even in a fertile land. The lot of pioneers is hard everywhere. Their continuous wheat-growing was followed by the inevitable—the so-called exhaustion of the soil. This, in turn, was followed by realization of the cause and by cessation of wheat. But farmers have learned that “exhaustion” is the wrong word for the condition of their soils. As their Governor, Dr. Withycombe, has been pointing out to them many years, they need to restore the humus, the organic matter, that the long wheat-growing has taken away. There has been no chemical change, no mineral loss of importance in the soil. The restorers are clover and vetch, chiefly clover, with the aid of lime and drainage. The achievement need not be difficult nor highly expensive, nor require long time. Twenty or thirty acres a year in clover will work wonders. And be it remembered that clover is a native plant in the Willamette Valley, although the red variety was imported. The first red clover seed was brought here by Charles W. Bryant, to Washington County, Oregon, from New York, in 1854. The first importation of white clover came with J. L. Parrish, the Methodist missionary, in 1840. Large quantities of lime-rock are cheaply available in Southern Oregon.

V.

Livestock is due to contribute largely to the improvement of agriculture in Willamette Valley. Always since pioneer settlers came, farm animals have been first auxiliaries in country life; there is not much really new for them now to do. But their functions can be enlarged and increased. In the departure from grain farming, cattle and hogs have proved themselves a most helpful resource; also sheep and goats. The herds and flocks of the Willamette Valley are among the finest of the world. And it should be added that in the breeding of horses, best animals are produced for heavy draft. Much has been done also in the line of speed horses. Oregon is famed in thoroughbred animals.

The early domestic animals were, as may be supposed, of "grade" stock. Although not blue-blooded, nor blue-ribboned, they were indispensable to pioneer life. The Willamette Valley proved itself a paradise for the domestic animals of the early settlers. There were, in the soil and in the vegetation and in the air in the mild climate, elements that stimulated the growth and the increase of the bone and sinew. It may seem strange to say that even without infusion of "better blood" from elsewhere, there was remarkable improvement in size, strength, and form in the succeeding generations. Particularly noticeable was this in horses.

The first domestic animals brought to Old Oregon appear to have been the hogs, which as already noted, arrived at Astoria in 1811, on Astor's *Tonquin*. The British, in 1824-25, began fur-trading and agricultural activities at Vancouver, on the Columbia, whence they expanded to French Prairie, on the Willamette River, to Nisqually, at Puget Sound, and to Cowlitz Farms, on Cowlitz River. The British brought to Oregon cattle, sheep and hogs, which multiplied fast. But it was not until 1837 that any considerable supply of cattle was available. In that year, Ewing Young brought a herd from California. These were known as "Spanish cattle" and their blood remained in Oregon long; perhaps is flowing yet. They were hardy and vicious and made much trouble for the settlers. Many went wild and roamed the woods. With the arrival of American pioneers from the Middle West, beginning in the 40s, came the more docile breed of Shorthorn or Durham cattle. David M. Guthrie, of Polk County, pioneer of 1846, was probably the earliest to bring in high-bred Shorthorns. In 1847 John Wilson brought another fine herd from Illinois. Captain Bensen and J. C. Geer, Sr., also brought good cattle that year. The first large influx of cattle came across the plains in 1846. I am informed by Mr. George H. Himes that the first Shorthorn bull was driven north of Columbia River in 1857, by S. D. Ruddell, of Thurston County, Washington.

Not until the early 70s were pure-bred cattle introduced in

the Northwest. In 1871 W. S. Ladd and S. G. Reed imported Shorthorn, Ayershire and Jersey infusions for their stock farm in Washington County. In 1870 Benjamin Stewart brought Devons to Yamhill County. The breeders that have contributed to the improvement of Willamette Valley herds since that time have been numerous and a large volume could be written of their achievements. Suffice it here to say, the cattle industry in the Willamette Valley has been built slowly and on a lasting basis. In the dairying branch much has been done and much is promised for the future. It may be in place to note that an important fodder product for this work is kale, which was introduced at Milwaukie in 1876 by Richard Scott. Another highly valuable food is vetch, which was introduced here in 1870 by William Chalmers, and which grows very luxuriantly in Willamette Valley. This pea plant has a first cousin in the wild pea which thrives here abundantly in brush places, thus indicating the favorable natural conditions. The total value of cattle in Oregon was given in the 1910 census as \$17,570,685.

VI.

Sheep breeding began in Old Oregon with the early pioneers, both British and American. In 1910 the value of sheep in the three states, as summarized in the Federal census was: Oregon, \$12,213,942; Idaho, \$15,897,192; Washington, \$1,931,170. In Oregon, sheep were third after horses and cattle as the chief livestock assets. In Idaho, sheep were second after horses.

The early sheep in Oregon were merinos. The first appear to have been imported by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1833, by sea. In 1842 Joseph Gale (American) drove a flock of sheep overland to Oregon from California. These were Spanish merinos. The first sheep driven across the plains—in 1844—were those of Joshua Shaw and son, Alva C. R. Shaw, of Polk County. Pure-bred merinos first came in 1851, brought from Ohio by Hiram Smith. In 1853 R. R. Thomp-

son brought to Oregon across the plains a large flock, assisted by David P. Thompson, both of whom later were famous in the Pacific Northwest. Other early breeders of pure-bred sheep were J. L. Parrish, T. L. Davidson, and Ralph C. Geer. Early in 1860 R. J. Jones and S. B. Rockwell imported pure-bred American and French merinos from Addison County, Vermont. I am indebted to Governor Withycombe for the following copy of a bill of sale for some of these sheep: "March 31, 1860. We have this day sold to Joseph Holman and J. L. Parrish, one French merino buck, \$500; four breeding ewes at \$275, \$1100; two young ewes (not in lamb), \$100; total \$1700. Received payment in cash and notes. (Signed) R. J. Jones, S. B. Rockwell."

It may be added that first-class live stock was present in sheep considerably earlier than in cattle or hogs, or horses, also that Oregon has long been a leading wool state and that its combing wools have been excelled by none in the world.

VII.

In the foregoing, the advent of pure-bred cattle in 1870-71 has been noted. About the same time W. S. Ladd and S. G. Reed imported from England prize-winner Berkshire and Essex swine. Two years before, Thomas Cross, of Salem, had also imported some high-bred Berkshires. It may be noted that the Berkshire family was common in Oregon for ten or fifteen years before these additions. As early as 1856 this kind of swine was here. The earliest hogs of the settlers were brought by Hudson's Bay Company, and old pioneers have many recollections of the troublesome beasts. No fences would hold the hardy animals; they wandered wherever their fancies took them and started many neighborhood enmities; out of this family of porkers developed the celebrated "razor back"—a vigorous specimen that frequently went wild in the forests and imitated its boar ancestors.

These "razor-backs" were too busy to let fat grow on their bones. They were always on the move and were rooters of

the first order of excellence, for which function they were equipped with an uncommonly long snout. Tradition has it—vouched for by humorous pioneers—that these beasts could reach through a rail fence even to the ninth row of potatoes.

A breed known as the "China," mostly white, very prolific, medium size, was known at Puget Sound, reputed to have been imported in the early 40s from England. I am informed by George H. Himes that David J. Chambers had "Chinas" at Puget Sound when the Himes family arrived there in 1853.

In recent years the beginnings of large pork production have started in Willamette Valley. While nearly every farmer has had his swine from earliest pioneer times, he has grown them usually in a small way. Not until the last few years has he begun to enlarge this business, as the farmer long ago did in the corn regions of the Middle West.

VIII.

The most valuable group of farm animals has always been that of horses. From earliest time these faithful allies of agricultural life have thrived in Willamette Valley and elsewhere in Oregon. The pioneer horses were medium sized, strong and fleet—a combination animal for all-round service. Later came Clydesdale and Percheron and Belgian infusions.

The American horse, like the American citizen, is a mixture of old-world families, and, as we are fond of saying that the human family in America has been improved by the intermingling, we may say this just as truthfully of the horse family. The English and the Dutch and the French colonists in America brought over their favorite breeds of horses; so did the Spaniards somewhat earlier, from whose importations spread the equines that were in possession of the Indians when the whites began exploring the continent. The "Cayuse" ponies of the Upper Columbia River probably did not precede Lewis and Clark more than 150 years.

Although the pioneers used oxen for crossing the plains in preference to horses for "prairie schooners," horses were

commonly employed and every immigrant planned either to bring horses with him or to obtain them at his destination in Oregon. The Middle West horses, evolved from 200 years of rough pioneer life, were a vigorous breed and were much improved through successive breeding in the Pacific Northwest. A good stallion came across the plains in 1843 with John G. Baker, a native of Kentucky. This animal, while not a thoroughbred, was a high class one. Another Kentucky stallion came across in 1851 with S. D. Ruddell from Missouri, and was taken to Thurston County, Washington, the next year. It may be in point to say that just as Kentucky sent to Oregon through Illinois and Missouri a large part of its pioneer settlers, so also it sent horses, and these horses, like the citizens, were most valuable in the progress of the country.

IX.

It may be appropriate here to note the methods of pioneer harvesting in Old Oregon, inasmuch as the progress of farm machinery always keeps pace with, or precedes, the growth of an agricultural community. As may be supposed, the old-time hand sickle and flails were in use in the earliest time. The first cradles for mowing were brought by Jason Lee in 1840, on the ship *Lausanne*, from New York. There were three types of cradles in pioneer times: the "turkey-wing," with handle almost straight; the "muley," with handle somewhat crooked; the "grapevine," with handle much bent. Some of the latter type are still in use. Late in the 50s the first mowing machines appeared and in the early 60s they had come into general use. The threshing machine arrived nearly a decade earlier. Thomas Otchin had one near Hillsboro in 1850. Chaff pilers were employed early. Dr. Whitman had one in operation at Waiilatpu, near Walla Walla, in 1846. The first chaff piler at Puget Sound was made by Isaac Wood and sons, and used four and one-half miles east of Olympia, in 1855. George W. Bush, the leader in farming at Puget Sound, introduced the first mower and reaper in 1856. Nathan

Eaton used the second mower beginning in 1857. The first thresher and separator was introduced north of the Columbia at Cowlitz Farms in 1856, by T. W. Glasgow, Daniel J. Hubbard, and John B. Forbes. This machine was brought to Thurston County in June-July, 1857. Mr. George H. Himes, now curator of the Oregon Historical Society, worked on the machine in August, 1857, on the farm of David J. Chambers, four miles east of Olympia. "The output of this machine," writes Mr. Himes in a recent note, "was five hundred bushels of wheat, or seven or eight hundred bushels of oats a day, as against fifty and seventy-five bushels when tramped out by horses and winnowed by the primitive method."

X.

Apple and pear production in "train load lots" is a development of the last fifteen or twenty years. The pioneers grew apples for home and local consumption; in the mining days of California they shipped considerable quantities thither. But the "fancy" fruit packed in labeled boxes, filling whole box cars and train loads, is a late idea of realization.

The pioneers found the Willamette Valley a paradise for apples. A wild crab apple is native in Western Oregon, and this wild fruit and the finest of cultivated grew in equal luxuriance; indeed the late Harvey W. Scott, forty years editor of the Portland Oregonian, used to tell of beautiful large apples, grafted on the native stock, growing to fine fruit beside the little crab apples on the same tree. Throughout the three Northwest states apples are probably more widespread than any other fruit. From early pioneer times, Oregon was named the "Land of Big Red Apples." They had no enemies, neither worm nor aphids nor scale, and needed little tillage. The origin of the fruit industry is commonly ascribed as beginning with the "traveling nursery," which Henderson Luelling hauled from Missouri to Milwaukie, in 1847. In that same year J. C. Geer, Sr., carried to the Willamette Valley a bushel of apple seeds. Mr. Ralph C. Geer

years afterward commended the Luelling nursery as having brought "more wealth to Oregon than any ship that ever entered the Columbia River" (*History of Willamette Valley*, page 302).

XI.

As for the more rapid progress of agriculture in Eastern Washington than in Oregon, the explanation lies in certain natural and man-made differences. Between Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon, the advantage of low elevation is on the side of the former. Besides, Eastern Washington is better watered; the Columbia River traverses the whole breadth of the country and with its tributaries has cut down the general level below that of Eastern Oregon. Again, the great railroad systems, terminating at Puget Sound, have covered Eastern Washington with a network of lines and branches, while in Eastern Oregon there has been little or no railroad transportation to compare with it. These advantages have stimulated activity as nowhere in Oregon.

XII.

Wheat-raising did not bring about the old lethargy of the Willamette Valley; was only a reacting symptom of it. The real reason for wheat-raising there, was the fitness of soil and Summer dryness to such crop; then unreadiness of the old population to change methods of tillage; next, the lack of "new blood" immigration. The easy farming of the pioneers seems to have produced a race of descendants too easy-going. Soil was so fertile and climate so mild that the children of pioneers fell into lazy habits of farming. The new generation and a fresh race of newcomers are pulling away from the old methods. They are restoring the soil and establishing the annual repair method; are cutting down the size of farms and incidentally, thereby trying to reduce the labor problem, have discarded the old idea that Summer dryness necessitates grain growing; are learning how to conserve,

for the dry Summer, the heavy rainfall of the three other seasons—this without artificial irrigation.

The pioneers were an active race, both in mind and in body. They were sharply aware of the new inventions as each came along and managed to bring them here, chiefly by sea, despite the general poverty of the country in the 50s. It would not be fair to judge the first generation of pioneers from the example of their slip-shod descendants, who have permitted the old farms in Willamette Valley to go unkempt and farm machinery to rust and waste in the fields. The first pioneers were not moss-backs; far from it. They were a stirring race of men and women; their twenty-five hundred mile trek across the plains shows them to have been hardy and untiring; absence of crime among them shows their sense of individual responsibility highly developed; also their regard for the golden rule. Marital infidelity was rare and divorce was unknown. They toiled early and late, and thought hardship the natural and inevitable portion. These habits were produced through generations of hard work and individual thrift in the Middle West and in the Atlantic Coast colonies. Their descendants in the Willamette Valley somehow did not inherit these characteristics, perhaps because life here was "easy," on account of rich soil and mild climate. It is well known that the sturdiest peoples are those which have had to struggle hard against natural disadvantages, such as those of Northern Europe. It seems not good for men and women to live without effort. Perhaps there was too much ease for the successors of the pioneers in the Willamette Valley. If so, this condition did not last long. The soil after a while "petered out" and its possessors had to go to work with a vim. In recent years they have been working to good purpose and the effects are good both on the land and on the individual character.